

TESTIMONY  
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH  
HB 6645 AN ACT CONCERNING COMPASSIONATE AID IN DYING FOR  
TERMINALLY ILL PATIENTS  
March 20, 2013

Good morning Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson, and members of the Committee on Public Health. My name is Rita Palazzo and I live at 43 Sleepy Hollow Road, Niantic CT. I am writing to **SUPPORT HB6645 AN ACT CONCERNING COMPASSIONATE AID IN DYING FOR TERMINALLY ILL PATIENTS.**

Thank you for taking the time to read my e-mail and listening to my story. This bill is one that is extremely important for a great many reasons. Within the next several pages -just know, that this is the short version. Given the time and the many numerous supporters for such a kind and loving way to help the ones you love, including each and every one of you, because NO ONE is going to escape the harsh reality of death. Hopefully, it will be an easy one and just die in ones sleep. A situation that I pray for nightly, because I am a realist.

I am getting to turn seventy two in May and since my younger years, starting at the age of 16 (which just happen to be ON my 16th. birthday, I was rushed to the hospital with a ruptured appendix, and since then, medically things went down hill from their.

During these years I have had cancer in five different places in my body, which along with treatments and medications I have been able to have a wonderful and productive life. I have also endured fourteen different types of surgery mostly stomach plus a hip replacement.

I have faced myself in the mirror during these years after loosing my hair twice, but as blessed as I am, the good thing is that I came away with this beautiful head of white hair.

But my story is really about the care I have had to give both my parents and a husband who lived four years longer than we were told by Sloane. At that time that January, they said that he would never make May; three to five months was there actual time frame, but he lived for four more years.

I now have to tell you how this all started.

As funny as this may sound, I started taking care of my mother when I was only three/four years of age. You see, she had a massive heart attack giving birth to my brother and me. And at that time they had no time to test for blood, she was dying because of the amount of blood that she lost. My uncle was at the hospital and because she lost so much blood they actually did an arm to arm blood transfusion right their while she was on the operating table to save her life. She had to have a C section.

After she was able to understand and hear the news, they told her that her son had died, and only live a few hours, he was too weak and did not make it. Yes, that put her into a tail spin, because with all that she endured at that time, my father told them to do whatever they wanted with the baby, because he did not want to have her or her family go through any more misery.

When she heard that news, she passed out again and we, mom and I stayed in the hospital for three months, they actually figured that it was best that I stay with her and that it just might give her more of an incentive to get better; but as I found out much later in life, she never forgave my dad for doing away with the baby as he did. Her words.

What happened after she came home is the hardship of all of this, she was not capable of taking care of me and so we went to live with my grandmother. As it would happen, for many years to come, she would lose her voice because her throat would swell up and her only means of communicating was for her to ring a bell to let me know that she needed help.

Her sisters taught me what color pills and how many to give her at that time, because there was no one home, just my mom and me. My dad would leave for work at three in the morning, and would come home by noon, but he really was useless.

Her sisters would come during the day and stay until after dinner. The rotating shift was amazing; she had three sisters and because my grandmother worked a few hours a day, but by the evening her mom would be home and her sisters would be around, this went on for several years, on a daily basis.

All of this changed when I turned seven or eight because we were now living in our own apartment. But that changed too. I was sent to private school by the time I was in the fifth grade, then to boarding school for high school and college. During those years she had two more heart attacks and finally by the mid sixties, she had a pacemaker placed in her.

For all of my life, she was never really up and around. She never worked a day in her life, she never drove and she would go out only on occasions that were special to her. She lived for many years and illness was always a part of her life. By the time she turned seventy, she came to live with me. I had a very big house (28 rooms) and it was easy for me to care for her, not only did I have the means and the support of my husband, but I was tired of running into New York every time she needed me. My father never objected, because it was one less thing he had to worry about.

During her four year stay with me, I had her to several doctors and finally discovered why she would do the things she did. She had Alzheimer's. She slowly disappeared. I had to put plastic under towels on all of my couches because she never remembered to walk into the bathroom. She would pass the stove and see a pot filled with something, not knowing it was dinner, and would just throw it away because she thought it was dirty. She never remembered me or any of my children. The only one she did remember was my husband because to her that was her son. She would tell you that her daughter died at birth.

JUST SO YOU CAN UNDERSTAND HOW CLEAR I AM WITH THIS BILL, IN THE CASE OF HB6656, TO ME THIS WOULD NEVER APPLY TO MY MOM, BECAUSE SHE

NEVER REALLY SUFFERED, SHE JUST DID NOT REMEMBER. In January of 1983 she died in her sleep.

My husband's story is quite different. This is where I wish this bill was in place. I really need your committee to think of all the people who are in a situation such as this right now. I am quite sure that you would not want to see any one you loved go through this slow and painful death.

Just so you have another piece of this care giving life of mine, my father came to live with me during the summer of 1987. He had lung and prostate cancer they removed three quarters of his right lung as well as his prostate. While he was living with me and for a reason I never understood he decided to drop his blue cross coverage. For whatever reason, I never understood. But now I was faced with a growing number of medical bills and chemo shots once a month to a tune of a thousand dollars a month. He was able to be placed on hospice care because at that point he was dying. But the most amazing thing happened, Hospice released him after nine months, he gradually got better and did not die. Go figure, this would only happen to him or maybe me. Because of his illness I really did make wonderful friends, who knew all about my situation with him, my son was married to the doctor that was the head of the hospital that took care of him and eventually most of my bills disappeared, bless them again. Because if I had to do all of this and pay for him as well I would have been crazy. I did however pay for the staff that I had take care of him on a twenty-four seven basis. It was easier for me to deal with them then deal with him. It is very hard to give your father a shower.

My husband on the other hand is much harder to write or thing about as you will see the date's it is this particular week that his end came. But let me back up for a minute.

I really need your committee to think of all the people who are in situation such as this. I am quite sure that you would not want to see any one you love go through this slow and painful death.

Just as you would figure, the day my dad went back to New York, which was now the end of October, my husband said as we were driving that he did not feel well and was in lots of pain. When we got back home to Atlantic Beach, I told him to lay down, but I did not want him to have anything to eat or drink, just in case we needed to go to the hospital.

By six a.m. that is exactly where we were. They asked me how I knew not to give him anything from the night before, but by this time, I was really an old pro at care giving. They were able to give all of the e-rays and blood work. and by 11 that morning, I knew he had liver cancer, we just did not know how sever it really was.

He had a very advance case of stage 4 liver cancer. As we both walked out of the hospital that day in January, I promised him that he would be here for my birthday and for many more to come.

We both did not realize how right I was, because he actually lived another four years. Yes, he did go into remission for about a year and a half, and he did go back to his business. We actually took the kids on a first class trip to Hawaii during that quality time as well, and I was able to give him his chemo treatment while we were away for that three weeks.

Here was a man that was six feet plus and was three hundred and twenty pounds, with the most beautiful full head of black hair and when he was done after that year, he was a hundred eighty pounds and no hair. He would cry looking at himself in the mirror. This was a tough guy from the Bronx, with a street attitude and a very brilliant mind, with only a high school education. He ran the third largest construction company in New York City with a staff of seventy five men always working and an office staff of twenty. Plus we owned race horses and had our own horse farm out in Yaphank Long Island. Yes we did have a few horses that won first place, but this was the place, that farm, those horses that made him the happiest. It took his mind away from everything.

During that time with each trip to the hospital, I would stay with him and sleep in the recliner chair in his room, there were times when his body would fill with so much water that they would have to tap him. And there were times that even the nurses in the hospital had trouble with this procedure because they did not have the size tubes that were needed, the envious always happened, the tubes would get clogged because of the waste matter in the body and I would be the one reattaching different size tubes to make sure the flow would not back up into him. No I never had any training, but the one thing I did have was common sense.

They taught me how to give him his treatments and how to look for the after effects that would always occur and how to treat them as well. I kept a daily journal so that when he would tell me at moments when he was scared out of his mind that "this never happened before, I always had the journal to go back to and say" Stop, yes you did, look I wrote it down". which would calm him right away.

This is how we lived for four most of the four years.

But what took place after the remission was horridness. His treatments of chemo on a daily basis was not easy, his stay in the hospital was hard at best. He had to go in for a week at a time. During this time, my oldest daughter had planned her wedding, because she wanted him to walk her down the aisle. She was to be married March 24th, 1988.

That dream ended when he took a turn for the worse. He started having very harsh pains, and it was impossible for him to keep anything in or down. When he was at his worse, I started to give him different color foods, because as they would come up he would say, "see, I'm dying" of course I would tell him he was crazy because "didn't I give you chocolate pudding or red Jell-O or green Jell-O" just to take his mind away from himself.

But I knew that by March 17th. his birthday, that I would not be able to keep him home any longer. He would get up and down all day because of the pain he could no longer bear, so into the hospital we went.

They did give him morphine, but for some reason it had a reverse effect on him, it only made worse, he would jump up and down from the bed to the floor, he would cry and look at me and beg me to help him, but there was nothing I could do. He would scream and scream, when he would hold me he would almost crush me or shake me, to make me try and understand how much pain he was in.

I should tell you that as I am now writing this memory, it is still very much alive because I feel every work; this is something NO ONE should have to go through. He died March 22nd. Yes, I had cancelled the wedding the month before, no he never knew and on the 24th. of March we were sitting in a funeral home, I knew he would never be able to addend the wedding, and I would never have gone without him.

I really need to stop writing because I could go on. But the one and probably the most important point I need to make here is this:

Given my past medical history, and my age, I do not want to suffer and most of all, I do not want to ask for help from family. I know I am dealing with lots of medical issues myself, I have in the past years I have been told I have lupus, osteoporosis, Sjogren Syndrom, Fibrodidnalgia, Merolgia Parethetical, several bouts of H.Pylori, and a very high liver count. It would be very difficult for me to have to depend anyone for anything, and will never ask for help.

Even now, I am getting ready to run for a four year term for the Planning Commission after just finishing two years. Every several months, my husband and I teach a cooking class to kids 11 & 12, on a Saturday morning. I fill in for the First Selectman's Executive Assistant when she is on vacation, I am also part of the Voters Registrars office as Deputy Moderator for the Town of East Lyme. We also do lots of volunteer work for the Senior Center. I attend several meetings several times a month in the evenings and on Wednesday, my happiest day, I pick up my 12 year old granddaughter from school and stay with her until her mom, my daughter, gets home from work.

I cannot sit still, because if I do I think, and that is the one place I cannot put my head. Please make this bill your number one priority. You and your committee are all we have. I am sure that every letter you will receive in support of this bill will be quite different, that is the number one reason as to why I am writing to you so you can try and understand people like us that have been or are in a situation such as this. Because if this were the other way around, I would be the one sitting in your chair.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted:

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